United Nations E/C.19/2003/17

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 March 2003

Original: English

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second session
New York, 12-23 May 2003
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Mandated areas

Information received from Governments**

Sweden

1. The Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations, in reference to the note of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, relating to the recommendations and priorities set out in the report of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on its first session, has the honour to submit the comments set out below.

2. The number of Saami in Sweden amounts to approximately 20,000. The majority live in the northern part of Sweden. Some 3,000 Saamis live in Stockholm. Over the last few years, a closer dialogue between the Swedish Government and Saami representatives has resulted in a stronger sense of partnership between the Government and Saami representatives as regards issues of concern to the Saami population. That process may be seen as a follow-up to the apology made by the Swedish Government to the Saamis for former injustices, which was made on the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, on 9 August 1998.

> "The Forum calls upon States to adopt the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples before the end of the decade."[1]

3. Sweden fully supports the priority attached by the Forum to the adoption of the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples before the end of the Decade of the World's Indigenous People in 2004. With that goal in mind, Sweden will continue to participate actively in the work of the working group preparing the Declaration.

* E/C.19/2003/1.
** Submitted late to ensure the inclusion of the most recent information.

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> "The Forum encourages States to include representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations in their delegations to the informal intersessional meeting on the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples."[2]

4. Sweden has promoted and supported a high level of transparency in the process of elaborating the draft declaration, with the inclusion of all parties concerned. Greater transparency is particularly important in order to reach an agreement on a draft text in the final stages of the process towards the adoption of the draft declaration.

5. Sweden strives to involve and inform the Saami Parliament and other Saami representatives about parts of the proceedings which are open to Governments only. Together with the other Nordic Governments, Sweden participates in informal consultations on the proceedings on the working group involving representatives of the Saami Parliament.

6. The President of the Swedish Saami Assembly was part of the Swedish delegation to the December 2002 session of the working group.

> "The Forum encourages States to undertake consultations with indigenous peoples to elaborate constitutional provisions and State policies relating to indigenous issues."[3]

7. Autonomy granted to the Saami people is very much related to the Saami Parliament. In 1992, the Swedish Parliament passed a law to set up an elected body with the primary task of nurturing a living Saami culture in Sweden. The governing body is an assembly with 31 members, all elected every fourth year among the Saami population. In addition to the main task of fostering Saami culture, it has been assigned other specific functions, inter alia, to decide on the distribution of funds allocated by the Government to promote Saami culture and to support Saami organizations. It also allocates other funds placed at the disposal of the Saami community for joint utilization and appoints the board of the Saami school. The Saami Parliament also directs efforts to promote the Saami language and participate in public planning to ensure that Saami needs are taken into consideration in the utilization of land and water resources. The Parliament is also responsible for information about Saami affairs.

8. According to the concept of autonomy, the Saami Parliament decides on the distribution of money set aside for Saami purposes in the national budget. In 2003, that appropriation amounts to 8,000,000 euros.

9. Some Swedish public authorities have a legal duty to consult the Saami Parliament on matters that affect the Saami, such as the utilization of land and water in the reindeer breeding area, mining claims, and language and education.

10. The Government has also set up a delegation on indigenous peoples, whose main objectives are:

(a) To deal with and follow up General Assembly decisions and to initiate, plan and carry out various measures, for example in the form of exhibitions, seminars and other similar arrangements to promote the aims of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People;

(b) To follow up United Nations objectives for the Decade that are relevant to the Swedish situation;

(c) To contribute towards increased Saami autonomy and Saami participation in political life;

(d) To promote Saami culture and traditional Saami economic activities and ensure that support for the Saami people has a coherent political approach;

(e) To contribute to greater public awareness of the Saami cultural heritage;

(f) To work for increased cooperation on Saami political issues in Scandinavia and the Saami area.

11. A majority of the members in the delegation are of Saami origin.

> "The Forum requests that Governments include in their programmes and plans and in their educational and cultural policies the contents of the indigenous knowledge, indigenous spiritual and religious traditions, indigenous customs and ceremonies, as well as indigenous histories, visions of the cosmos, philosophies and values. The rights of the indigenous peoples to their sacred sites and ceremonial objects and to the distribution of their ancestral remains should be respected. They wish to have their cultural properties returned to them, particularly if those properties were taken without their permission, as well as restoration and protection of their environment, lands and resources. The cultural heritage made up of the archaeological zones and sacred sites that are used for tourism, should be taught to non-indigenous children and young people so that they know the contribution of indigenous culture to all societies and to this globalized world."[4]

12. The Government has embarked on an information campaign on the Saami people aimed at the entire Swedish population. Opinion surveys show that there is a need for more information on the Saami and their culture and rights. The currently insufficient awareness of the situation of the Saami among the general public has led to a proliferation of myths, prejudices and stereotypes. The public debate on Saami issues has thus far been one-sided, with a clear focus on territorial disputes, reindeer breeding rights and spectacular events. The aim of the information campaign is to rectify that situation. The campaign is scheduled for a period of five years and will cost a total of 2,000,000 euros. It will target public authorities, non-governmental organizations, schools, the media and the general public.

13. Saami children can receive Saami pre-school, elementary and secondary school education in the northern provinces. Today, there are six Saami elementary schools where children can study the subjects offered in the provincial elementary schools, as well as receive education in the Saami language and culture. Those schools receive state subsidies amounting to 3,000,000 euros. In some of the schools in the northern region, the teaching of the Saami language and culture is integrated into the curriculum of the provincial schools.

14. At the University in Umeå, there is a special department for Saami studies. The University also organizes courses with Saami subjects throughout the northern area.

15. The issue of accession to the ILO Convention No. 169 is still being prepared. The report of the inquiry submitted in 1999 indicated that Swedish legislation on property rights needs to be strengthened in order to make accession possible.

16. In relation to the above-mentioned report, the Reindeer Breeding Policy Commission has recommended reinforcements in reindeer breeding legislation and establishing a new relationship between competing industries in northern Sweden, forestry, agriculture and reindeer breeding. Those recommendations have been submitted to parties concerned for comments and are now being prepared within the Ministry of Agriculture.

17. A boundary commission was appointed in 2002. The commission will define the boundaries for the Saami reindeer breeding area, giving the priority to the extent of the area to be used for winter pasture. The commission plans to submit its findings in December 2004.

18. The scope of the Saami hunting and fishing rights on the land which they traditionally occupy will be further clarified by a commission.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 23* (E/2002/43/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Corr.1), chap. I, sect. B, para. 18.

[2] Ibid., para. 19.

[3] Ibid., para. 23.

[4] Ibid., para. 27 (c).